

- KEN FIREMAN:** I'm Ken Fireman, the managing editor for *SAGE Business Researcher*. And I'm speaking with Joe Lapointe, who has written our report on the US gun industry. Hello, Joe.
- JOE LAPOINTE:** Hello.
- KEN FIREMAN:** It's been well-known that since the Parkland school shooting in February, there's been a surge of activism by high school students around the country demanding gun control measures. But you write that there's also a movement afoot on the corporate level to take action against the gun industry. Can you describe what's going on?
- JOE LAPOINTE:** I would say it's a crossfire on the corporate level going both ways. You see things like Dick's Sporting Goods cutting back on what are known as assault rifles. And you see companies like Mossberg, which makes rifles, responding angrily to Dick's Sporting Goods.
- KEN FIREMAN:** OK. And what's motivating companies like Dick's to make these moves? Are they concerned about the damage to their corporate reputation with their customers?
- JOE LAPOINTE:** A little bit, they are. They've got-- in the words of a political science professor-- they've got their finger to the wind of public opinion. These big box stores and chain stores don't really depend on guns and ammunition part of their business volume. So they can afford to take the high road here without really losing business.
- KEN FIREMAN:** I see. OK. And what about the impact on the gun companies? Is it affecting their bottom line in any way?
- JOE LAPOINTE:** Well, the gun companies-- it's an interesting thing. The gun companies' bottom line is affected by many things. And one of the things that they'll even tell you-- those that will talk to you-- will say it is fear that motivates gun sales. So when citizens fear gun regulations, as they did in the run-up to the 2016 presidential nomination, gun sales go up. When they get a president who they feel is on their side, the gun sales go down. It's almost an inverse relationship.
- KEN FIREMAN:** Right. Sure. What's been the industry's response to these moves? You cited Mossberg. How has the rest of the industry responded to the fact that companies like Dick's are beginning to do what they're doing?
- JOE LAPOINTE:** Well, they're keeping their powder dry, so to speak. It's very hard to get in touch with these

folks. The national spokesman is the National Sports Shooting Foundation. And they don't seem too worried. The spokesman, one of the few people who would talk to me, told me in this article that 80% of the guns in the country are sold by small dealerships, small stores. And of course, that would just go up if the big box stores stop selling guns. And absent any major change in gun laws in the country, the gun industry is not too worried about this effort going on at the moment, although it's a very fluid situation. And a year ago, I don't think we could have seen Parkland coming, at least the Parkland reaction coming.

KEN FIREMAN: Right. That's absolutely right, I think. And you write that the National Rifle Association, the NRA, really has had nothing to say about this, won't talk about it. Is that right?

JOE LAPOINTE: The National Rifle Association prefers not to talk to the media most of the time. You can always watch NRATV on your internet hookup. They do send out email responses to your questions. And mostly, they say, we have nothing to do with the gun industry. We defend the Second Amendment and nothing more.

KEN FIREMAN: OK. More broadly, what kind of shape is the gun industry in generally? Were sales, for example, were sales declining even before Parkland?

JOE LAPOINTE: Sales started to decline once President Trump was elected in November of 2016 because the fear of harsh regulation was no longer there. Also, I found in my reading and my interviews that this industry goes through cycles. And it's up and down a lot. And they sort of take that in stride. Believe it or not, wars are not that good for the gun industry. Because when they gear up production for a certain kind of a gun at a certain time, it doesn't always translate into the civilian marketplace. However, right now, they're down some. But it's still profitable, at least according to the research that I made.

KEN FIREMAN: What's the most surprising thing you learned in the course of reporting this story?

JOE LAPOINTE: I learned several surprising things. One was two-thirds of American gun deaths are suicides. I wouldn't have thought that it was that much. I would have said maybe one-third at the most. And I don't think a lot of people realize that. And I also found out that the gun deaths in the US are going up. It's around 38,000 now. And that's up from 33,000 a few years ago.

There's kind of a sense-- a lot of them are suicides. There's kind of a sense of despair in the country. And when you have access, ready access, to a firearm, it's relatively easy to commit suicide in that mood.

KEN FIREMAN: OK. Well, that's really interesting and very sobering, too. I've been speaking with Joe Lapointe, who has written the *SAGE Business Researcher* report on the gun industry. Thank you for joining us, Joe.

JOE LAPOINTE: You're welcome. Thank you.